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ABSTRACT

Noting that sociocultural approaches to cognitive development provide valuable insights into the influences on learning of relationship and cultural variables, this book discusses recent theory and research on the social context of cognitive development. The book takes the view that the social settings in which children live and grow provide both opportunities and constraints for cognitive development. The book's central purpose is to convey the utility of a social-contextual perspective for the study of cognitive development. The first part of the book describes the basic formulation of a social approach to cognitive development. Chapter 1 provides a general introduction to this approach, illustrated with examples from the memoirs of notable people. Chapter 2 focuses on mechanisms of cognitive development, with particular attention to the social processes that support and lead to intellectual growth. Chapter 3 examines the social and cultural foundations of cognitive development, and includes discussion of some of the primary agents of cognitive socialization. The second part of the book concentrates on what can be learned about certain specific domains of cognitive development when social context is taken into account. Four domains are examined: attention (chapter 4), memory (chapter 5), problem solving (chapter 6), and planning (chapter 7). The course of intellectual growth in each domain is described, and social factors that support or constrain it are identified. Chapter 8 revisits the question of whether and how social context can be conceptualized as a mechanism of cognitive change. The chapter examines the theoretical and practical utility of this approach and speculates about why its impact on the field has been rather limited. Future directions of research are also proposed. (Contains 389 references.) (KB)

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